


The Mary Washington College Review of Arts and Literature



A U B A D E



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Mary Washington College Review of Arts and Literature

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A U B A D E

The Mary Washington College Review of Arts and Literature

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Cover art, "Kate" by Jennifer Carroll

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Jeremy Austin

Untitled

Mixed Media

Night Shift

At two thirty-seven
I am nine years old and cannot sleep.
Tonight my father threatened to rip the clock
From the wall of my yellow room. He
Says I am obsessed with the time. Bothered
By numbers.
He knows I count the umpteen hours,
The rolling of a zillion minutes.

Three twenty-nine
When they are snoring in the next room
As they are doing now, I know
I am not alone, being awake. It is
Not the first time. I am
Like the hundreds of hopeless ants soon to be
Underneath my small brother's feet.
My chest caves in and my belly collapses
And my heart pounds and plays me hard,

A flat, tight drum.
I cry as quiet as the dying daffodil
Chopped by the neighbor's lawn mower,
So that Mom and Dad won't have to know
Again that I am unlike them and not asleep
At four seventeen, crying

For animals broken and smashed like bottles or
Pumpkins rotting on the road
How many deer and dogs in a day, moths in a
Minute, squirrels in a second, cats and
Racoons in a sad half-second?

An owl makes lonely, mourning,
Early morning sounds at four forty-two
I close my burning eyes and hear
The songs of bruise-skinned whales
Speared through the waves on Jaques Cousteau
Three days ago.

In my room are hundreds of children
Hungry on Sunday TV with thousands
Of friendly flies on their faces and
Stomachs like blown-up balloons
That hide the scantness of their legs
From their own two eyes,
Infected sleep running down dirty cheeks.

I cry to the hundred pretty dolls I don't have
Time to play with,
I am sorry how I am spoiled
Instead of starving.
By tens I have counted

My thick swallows all night.
Five thirteen
Birds wake up in the dark outside
My two windows with white polka-dot curtains and
I feel like throwing up on the cold wood of the floor,

Turning inside out, knowing I
Have been left behind by the numbers who whisper
And the night.

At school they will never know
That I hate them when they sleep,
Leaving me with my eyes wide open to watch
The glowing faces of numbers who whisper

Too loud their silly secrets.
Now, at six o'clock
I wait for the shadows on the ceiling
To go pale as my face and to
Seep shamefully into the closet.
I name them with numbers, counting
Their reluctant, subtle, almost
Unnoticeable departures.

Caroline Porter

Ireland

Black bones of trees
creak and snap
as hurried
 horses
dash in the grey
showers of twilight
 and the fires of the sky
are dimmed; faces are raised
as they look at the hours
 passed; grey rock stone wall
is falling to the green
 and the running
stream.

Jennifer Carroll



Kim Stoker

Gant #1

Photograph

My Father Seized By Fire

After the addition was built
my father was suddenly seized by fire.
He saw it everywhere,
creeping out from under the kitchen cabinets,
lurking in the lamp shades.
He would rush out in the middle of each night
in only his underwear,
his hair flying in matchstick flames,
and try to catch the villain.
His thick hands checked the toasters,
the heaters, the television sets.
He made emergency ladders
to throw out of the windows
of the new second floor.
He would scream
Faster! . . . Faster!
out of the window during
our Saturday afternoon fire drills.
My brother and I would climb down,
listening to the neighbors snickering
on the other side of the gate.
Faster! . . . Faster!
We would burn our hands
on the prickly dry rope,
sometimes actually feeling
the heat of the house
dangling on our legs.
We would look up and see
the mad look of flames in his brow
and we knew he would be there,
the fatally dedicated look
of a man whose seen the destruction
and doesn't want to look back.

Kathy Cottle



Holly Dittmar

Wall Hanging Study

Stoneware

Wild Card

A bunch of us from the old gang got together to see my little brother Freddy through his ordeal at the courthouse. We all knew he was guiltier than Nixon, but we went anyway, just so he could see some familiar faces before he got put away. There was Jodi-lee, Henry, still cross eyed as ever and getting fat and bald, Mason, T.O., and the Miller twins Jan and Mike. Even Missy Tanner showed up, which suprised all of us since I had once talked Freddy into puttin' her favorite doll into the blender.

This wasn't the first trouble Freddy had been in, not by a Milwaukee mile. His last offence, he had stolen a pack of twenties out of a stack of cash register drawers that were waiting to be counted. He tried to use his brains, taking the twenties from a drawer close to the bottom so they wouldn't be noticed missing til after he had gone home. He stuffed the money down the front of his pants. Well, what he didn't know he found out three minutes later. The pack of bills were what was called a theft deterrent, and they were the kind that exploded after being taken out of the register. They'd blow up and spray red ink all over the place, and the criminal would be caught "red handed," so to speak. Well, that's what happened to Freddy, or close enough. That pack of money exploded and he fell down, thinking with all that blood, he'd been shot dead. The managers found him lying on the floor, staring wide eyed at the ceiling. He was so pathetic, I guess, that they just fired him after making him replace the money. They swore they'd come forward if he ever got to anymore trouble. Thank heavens they never did find out, becuae Freddy's new crime was embarrassing enough without any further complications.

It seems that Freddy went onto a hamburger stand with funny nose and glasses and his finger in his pocket and tried to hold the place up. When he said "Stick em up, " the cashier just laughed and laughed at him and when Freddy looked down, his finger was poking clean through a hole. He left and went back a little later with a real gun, and would have gotten away if he hadn't managed to shoot himself in the foot on his way out the door.

After the jury said guilty we left. Freddy waved to us, grinning ear to ear. Come to think of it, he was always smiling at something like a bare assed fool. We just shook our heads at the whole business, went back to my house and started drinking beer. We weren't stink faced drunk, not yet, but I could tell it wasn't a long way off. We had ourselves a good laugh, becuae even though he was kin, we had to admit the whole thing was made to be laughed at.

"Time was, P'trisha Ann, that you could talk that boy into a bathtub full of piranha," Henry said as he finished off another beer.

I smiled, knowing it was true. In fact, it had been true about all

of them, and still was. "Yeah," I said. "He was one for following my lead." Jodi-lee handed me a beer and I put it beside all the others I'd left untouched.

"It's a true wonder you're not in jail right beside him," said Jodi-lee.

I stared back at her. She was wobble woozy and had to concentrate hard on her bottle when she went to take a drink. She looked back at me, slow witted and doe-eyed. "Well, you were always a bit crazy, the both of you."

"Yeah," I admitted, "but we're entirely different kinds of crazy."

"That's for sure," Henry said standing up. "Why, Freddy was always a few fries short of a happy meal." Then he looked confused, like he forgot where he was going and sat back down.

"He used to eat pencil shavings," he said, staring at his shoes. "Remember that P'trish Ann? Right out of the sharpener, like they was peanuts." I remembered that Freddy had always been famous for his peculiar eating habits and was known throughout the county, both with kids and adults, as the nanny goat boy. Mamma took him to the doctor once for a stomachache and the doctor swore that he saw all the planes that disappeared out of the Bermuda Triangle, right there in Freddy's stomach.

"Course, we know that it was you that worried that boy crazy," Henry added.

"No now, let's call fair fair. Freddy was hollering out the wrong end of a tree stump long before I ever got to him."

"You mean it wasn't all your shenanigans?" Henry opened up a new beer and stuck the cap in his shirt pocket.

"It never was," I said. But it was true enough that as a kid I was always one for coming up with bright ideas. I'm proud to say that a few of them even worked and no one was ever hurt. Not too much. One time I talked my older brother Porter into letting me mow the lawn for him. He wanted to go visit with Linda Parker, so he gave me most of the money, and he told me that if I messed anything up he would twist my arms right off.

I went out and put a stake in the middle of the lawn and tied a long piece of twine to it. I tied the other end to the power lawn mower and played the devil getting it started. It gasped to life and jolted forward. Then it moved slowly, bumping across the lawn. The string caught and the mower began to arc its way in a wide circle. I was pretty proud, and went inside to get the Coke-a-Cola that was part of the deal. I dilly dallied drinking it, pretending it was whiskey or scotch, which I'd seen people drink on tv. It burned my throat and made my teeth taste like chalk. I didn't see so much to it after all.

I was feeling my oats, so I went into Porter's room and started digging through his records. I listened to them on my close n' play, and

half way through a scratchy Neil Sedaka, I remembered the mower. I ran outside and it was chugging away at a standstill and pulling at the stake. I cut it off and surveyed the yard. The lawn was cut in a crazy spiral, like a pinwheel, but I figured it was as good a job as Porter had ever done. Then I saw that I'd run over mama's flowers. I made Freddy help me patch them back together with tooth-picks and scotch tape. No one noticed right off, but they were a bit curious two days later when they all died at once. I told em that I'd seen our dog, Sir Arf a Lot, peeing on them. Porter gave me the eye and never did let me cut the grass for him any more.

When we were kids, our summers were spent at my grandparents house. It was supposed to be good for us, but most all we did was get into trouble. We're lucky that they only discovered a few of our shenanigans though. Our mothers stayed the week, while our dads worked and came to stay on weekends. It was a pretty fair system, we'd work hard and play hard, and get tanned as Indians. One summer the older boys were all playing with sling shots. They made them with heavy sticks and sections of inner tubes from the worn out tires from my granddaddy's tractor. I wanted to try my hand, but they said I was a two count loser: I was too little, and I was a girl. I told them they'd see, and they'd be powerful sorry when I wouldn't let them play with my new invention.

My idea was this: if it worked small, it would certainly work big. Even though I was younger than the rest of my group, I set them to gathering the needed tools. I gave them directions, not really knowing what I was doing, and making most of it up as I went along. I took a whole inner tube and swiped tin snips and instructed the boys on how to cut. It was a plumb sloppy job, and we had to cut up another inner tube. Then I showed them how to nail it up between two trees and we couldn't wait to try it out. I called it the Sooper Dooper Martian Moon Sling Shot. We shot off Freddy's shoe, and were so pleased with ourselves that our smiles threatened to meet at the back of our necks and drop the tops of our heads off. Then we tried our luck with rocks of all sizes, buckets of water, and tin cans. We shot off Porter's prized collection of cat's eye marbles in one go, and they glittered in the air like a thousand jewels. We shot a handful of nails, pretending they were poison missiles, and handfuls of hay, running under the glorious rain of golden chaff. Then we all just sort of stood around, wondering what to do next. My cousin Wanda Sue sneezed, and with the whiplash of her head an idea came to me.

"Now we got to shoot somebody."

"What we gonna shoot at em?" Henry asked.

"Naw, I mean shoot em out of it."

"Like a cannon?" They looked at me in admiration and wonder.

"Just like Evil Kenivel," I said.

"Then I'm the man for the job," Henry volunteered, pushing his way toward the slingshot. I had wanted Wanda Sue, on account of she was so small, but Henry was more stubborn than a pack of mules on a Sunday. We tried him out, but the rubber just sort a sunk to the ground. Henry climbed out and pouted. I called him a gourdhead and told him he was lucky we didn't have to renail the whole thing.

We got Wanda Sue to sit like a cannonball and loaded her into the slingshot. It was like putting a baby in a hammock and then all of us grabbed hold, pulling and kicking our toes in the dirt. Then we all let go, and Wanda Sue sailed through the air, laughing so pretty it made our ears ache with happiness. She must have gone a good fifteen feet, laughing that angel laugh. Then she came back to mother earth, landing hard, and the only thing to soften her landing was a mound of steaming fresh cow shit. She started to cry and we ran to her. It was only a matter of time until the adults came to nose out what was the matter, so I told Henry to cut down our contraption. Wanda had broken her wrist and was covered with cow poop, but it only took the promise of a nickel from each of us to convince her she had fell down playing tag. I was bold about the nickel. I didn't have one to my name, so I went and asked my mother. She asked why I needed it and I told her that we all felt so bad that we'd each promised to give Wanda Sue a nickel if she was brave at the hospital.

"Aren't you all just the sweetest things." My mother smiled at me so tenderly that it hurt, and took a whole dollar out of her pocket book. Wanda got the whole dollar, but she didn't play with us much after that.

The next summer, after everyone had sufficiently recovered from the "Great Slingshot Incident," I decided to build an airplane. Henry said I was just plain crazy, and he refused to help. But after he saw everyone else pitching in and having a grand time, he didn't want to be left out.

We took an old red wagon that we'd found in the barn and cleaned it up a bit. We built the wings out of chicken wire, newspapers and old garden stakes that my grandfather had left in a pile. It looked pretty sturdy and I sat in it, feeling proud and imagining I was Miss Amelia Earheart. I got Henry to lug it up onto the barn roof and we stopped the wheels with my grandfather's sheep shears. Henry wanted to be my co-pilot and I had to break the news to him that he was just too big. He squawked and stomped, but I told him I needed someone big and strong to give the Cloud Catcher (that's what I named my plane) a good push. He didn't seem convinced.

"All the good pushmen are famous," I said.

"That ain't true."

"Is too."

"Name me one."

I looked at him in indignant surprise. "You mean to say that you never heard of Big Ben McClellan?" He looked unsure and I knew I had him. "He was only the one to give Orville and Wilbur Wright the big push they needed."

"That so?" He brightened.

"Look in a book." I knew he never would, so I continued. "Then there's Red Johnson, Lefty Martin, and Grant and Tinker Williams. They were twins." The Miller twins looked pleased at this and Henry shook his head.

"All them," he said.

"Look in a book." Everything was settled, or so I thought. I picked Freddy to be my co-pilot, because he was family and a lot smaller than me. We were all ready to fly, but Freddy refused to go without a parachute. I'd convinced him that we would fly so high that he was afraid he may fall out. It was a delay I hadn't counted on, but then I figured maybe a parachute wasn't such a bad idea. I made Henry cart the plane back down off the roof so the grown ups wouldn't suspicion what we were up to. Then I sat down to figure the parachutes.

I ended up using some of my grandfather's old suspenders and used bailing twine to attach the sheets that I had personally swiped. We had to poke holes in the corners of them to tie the string on proper but I figured we'd be so famous that they'd become relics and no one would care. We hauled my little plane back onto the roof, ready to make our maiden flight. Henry was all antsy and excited and stopped me from climbing in after I'd put on Porter's football helmet. He showed me a bottle of Coke.

"I haven't time for a drink just now." I thought I sounded brave and dramatic, but Henry shook his head and smiled. He moved me aside, raised the bottle to his chest, and cleared his throat.

"I hereby dub thee...Cloud Catcher!" I was touched by his gesture and a little jealous that I hadn't thought of it. But he gave the bottle a smooth swift swing and it hit the side of the wagon. It didn't break but the wagon had a curved impression indelibly dented into the side. He looked bewildered and watched the pop fizz all angry inside the bottle.

"Well, Bon Voyage," I said, climbing in. I situated Freddy comfortably in front of me and gave the thumbs up signal. All the smiling excited faces blurred as Henry grunted into a magnificent He-man push. Then Freddy and I began to fly.

I'd like to say that we flew up and touched the ceiling of clouds, that we did barrel rolls and buzzed fields of skittish cows and then buzzed our excited parents. Even my Aunt Sissy would have to be nice to me after my heroic landing. We'd all get our pictures in the paper, there'd be parades, and maybe we'd even get to meet Captain Kirk, of the starship Enterprise. But here's what really happened: we hung in the air for a cartoon second, long enough to see the wide-eyed faces and

realize we weren't flying after all. Then the barn roof disappeared and my stomach shot up into my shoulders. We tumbled and pitched, seeing sky and ground and sky again.

Thank the stars in the heavens that Henry was so cross-eyed, because he pushed us off the roof at an angle. We did our barrel roll right into an apple tree that had grown up beside the barn. We got stuck, tangled, jerked, and knocked but we soon ran out of air and quit falling. The air got knocked out of me so hard I thought I was dead. When my vision cleared, I saw the wagon caught up near the tree top, its wheels still spinning. Closer to the ground, Freddy hung by a tough suspender strap. We managed to get most everything hid away, but one bed sheet and the wagon were impossibly stuck and remained in the tree's possession. They hung like someone's bad idea of Christmas ornaments, and we decided the best course of action was to pretend like we didn't notice. We were banged up pretty bad, but we didn't say a word because we knew that we'd all lose our hides if the truth came out.

Later my mother called us all together and lead us to the barn yard. We put on our best innocent faces and gamoled along side her. Finally, she stopped and put her hands up on her hips. "Well?"

We looked at each other, at the barn, at our shoes and at the sky, but we did not look at the apple tree. My mother made an impatient noise and stabbed her thin finger at the tree.

"It's just an old apple tree," I said. She made the noise again, stamped her foot and pointed again. We had no choice but to notice the contents of the tree.

"Great Bird of the Galaxy," I said and everyone else said appropriate exclamations of amazement. We wore the look of innocent surprise that I think only children can master.

"Don't tell me you kids don't know anything about that."

"Gosh to Goshen ma. How on earth'd you get that thing up there?" She stopped suddenly, considering the words that some invisible man was whispering in her ear. Her face curled and fell. "Oh my God, she looked at us. "Oh my dear God."

"What?" I asked. But she just put her hands up to her face and made a growling noise.

"I've had it," she said.

"Had what?"

She put her fists by her side and growled again. Then she stomped off stiffly and never mentioned it again. As I remember it, we never did get that wagon down.

Eighteen summers ago, when I had turned nine, my cousin Melinda set in motion a chain of events that none of us have ever forgotten. She was older and would never play with us because we

were so wild. She always wore dresses with lace and shiny black shoes, and she looked like Pollyanna only with more hair. One day she came to us because we were being too noisy. She told us there was an evil spirit in the house and it would gobble us all up in our sleep if we didn't be quiet. Furthermore, she knew where this spirit lived. She took us up to the third floor and sneaked open a big creaky old closet door. We crowded around and she pulled away musty towels and coyly lifted the lid off an old laundry chute. We craned our way over the hole and looked down the throat of the house. It smelled hot and stale, and I suddenly believed that the closet had a good set of teeth and would swallow us up. We all scrambled back as she dropped the lid. She started to leave and turned back at the steps. "You all mind what I said."

We all stood there and thought about it. With all of them there, there was no way I could just let it go. So I started to go back into the closet, but Henry grabbed by arm.

"You can't go in there."

"Don't tell me you believe all that sissy stuff," I said. I looked at the ring of solemn faces that surrounded me. I couldn't be much angry with them because I believed it too.

"There is no Boogie Monster in there." None of them moved and for the first time I doubted my craftiness. "There ain't no such a thing as ghosties," I said.

"Prove it," Henry said.

"I sure will." I went in, hoping they didn't see how my hands were shaking. I sneaked a quick look over my shoulder, half expecting the closet to go dark as it swallowed me. They all had such white faces that I might of turned and run if Freddy hadn't looked so sure of me. I lifted up the lid and pushed everything aside. "Hey ghostie, take theis." I spit down the hole and waited for a reply. When none came I crossed my arms and glared at them. "You all are the biggest bunch of chickens this side of the county line." They all came to life then and we tested the chute out for the next several minutes. The other end came out in the basement, and we took turns catching the objects that were dropped through. The first thing to go through was one of Melinda's dolls, and it disappeared almost immediately. It came shooting out of the hole with a puff of dust and fell into the even dustier basement. It was covered with cobwebs and spider nests. We dropped a whole load of stuff down that hole. We dropped a rubber ball down to see if it would bounce back, but it never did. Soon enough we got kinda bored, and naturally they turned to me.

"There ain't but one thing to do," I said. "We gotta send someone down." The bigger kids were obviously out because the hole was far too small. I climbed bravely in, but Henry took revenge for all the times I had told him no. He said to send Freddy since he was smaller.

There was no way out of it so we picked Freddy up and carried him into the closet. We loaded him in like a bullet into a huge chamber. Freddy just smiled and waved bye-bye. We let go and heard him tumbling down for a second. Then there was nothing. Everyone looked at me horrified, thinking that the monster had gobbled him up after all. Then Freddy began to howl.

"Shhhhhh," we said.

"I'm stuck," he wailed.

"Shhhh."

"I'm stuck."

"Be quiet. We'll have you out quicker that you can pull your head out of a skunk's hole." I looked at the others. "We'll just throw stuff on top of him till he pops out the other end." They agreed and we set to gathering stuff. We made a pile of pillows and blankets in the basement so he would have a good landing, and then we went back to work. We started throwing little things at first, but it didn't turn the trick. We moved to bigger things, and I saw that we had moved to silliness when Jodi-lee threw in a bar of soap. Through it all, Freddy fussed and cried like a rabbit. I made them stop.

"It's not working, that's for sure." They all agreed and we stood around with our hands in our pockets, pretending to think. While the stuff hadn't knocked him loose, it had insulated and muffled his crying.

"What now?" We snatched the mop and the broom and lashed them together. We fished some of the stuff out and tried to use the long pole to push him free. He screamed some more and he sounded so frightful that I imagined the house really was alive and was starting to digest him. I had seen some old bleached bones by the drainpipe, and I began to think that when the old house was done eating him up, it would eject his bones out the drainpipe; white dry and picked clean.

"We need some Crisco," I said. Henry volunteered to go get it but as he started down the steps our mothers called us for lunch. We ate our lunch quietly, claiming that Freddy was off playing at Rocky's. We looked through our eyelashes, our heads lowered, pretending not to hear the strange sounds that came from the bowels of the house. I looked over at Melinda and her eyes were wide and buggy, and I had to wonder just what was holding them inside. She acted just like she had a mouthful of live centipedes crawling around inside. Henry skillfully commandeered a can of lard and made off up the steps. We followed after him and by the time we got there he was already greasing up the sides of the chute. I smeared the last of the grease on the mop head and began swabbing the sides of the shoot as far as I could reach. I knocked Freddy on the head several times, but it couldn't be helped.

We lowered a rope down the hole and told Freddy to hang on. A couple of times there was a sharp snap and the rope came up empty. Then on the fifth try we felt the tug of heaviness. We began to haul him

out of the hole, and he rumbled up like a living elevator, carrying a load of stuff with him. Just as his curly blond head poked out of the darkness he lost his grip. His mouth and eyes got big but he didn't make a single sound. Except for the bumbling drum as he moved through the wooden chute. Then he shot out of the bottom of the hole making a thonging sound, like a cork being pulled out of a jug.

I wasn't there to actually see what happened, but I certainly did hear it. It seems that my grandmother had gone down to the basement to do the laundry. She was all bent over with her pink plastic laundry basket when she heard the rumbling. She just missed seeing Freddy fall out of the ceiling, but she saw the disturbed dust particles that swirled in his wake. Then Freddy jumped up out of the pile of sheets, all covered with grease, dirt, and spider shit. Grandma screamed and Freddy screamed and Grandma screamed again. She backed into a chest high stack of boxes and they toppled over, hitting a stack of newspapers. Freddy swears that the entire room looked like a set of giant junk dominoes. As all the stuff started falling, grandma screamed again. So did Freddy. She was screaming because she still wasn't sure just what was going on and Freddy was screaming because he knew he was going to get his hind end adjusted. We came clattering down the stairs like a herd of rabid pygmies and stopped in our tracks as the last stack of junk fell over and spread itself across the floor. By this time all the adults had crowded in behind us.

"Just look at this mess," my father whistled.

"What is going on?"

All eyes turned to me and I saw that Freddy had started to cry. His face was all bent up like the tragedy masks that you see in the theater but he still wasn't making any noise.

"We were only playing," I said.

"Playing what for God's sake," my Aunt Lil demanded.

"We were throwing things through the chute, and Freddy here was catching them."

"Is that a fact?"

"Yessum," I said and everyone nodded.

"Will you look at this mess," my father said again.

My Aunt Lil had waded through all the junk and inspected Freddy carefully. "I don't think the whole truth's been told," she said. Then my grandmother came back to life.

"How the devil did you kids find that old chute?"

I looked up to the top of the steps. Someone was there in dark black outline and I could tell by the shape of the bow in the hair that it was Melinda. But I didn't tell and neither did anyone else. Our punishment was to clean up the basement. All but Freddy, because my mom had suspicioned what had really happened and carried him off. We cleaned that basement for what seemed like the age of man, and then

my father stepped heavily down the stairs. He crossed his arms over his chest and looked at us sternly.

"You kids feel bad?"

"Yessir. Real bad."

"You think you've learned your lesson?"

We all nodded, and would have stood there nodding til our heads dropped off. "Yes indeedy, we sure have." But none of us could have said exactly what it was that we had learned.

"All right then," he said. "You all go on out into the yard and play. And stay out of trouble." He sounded stern, but I could tell by the wiggle of his ears that he was smiling behind his beard.

Out in the yard we gathered around, not sure if we should laugh or cry or what. I looked up at a window and saw Freddy sitting behind the blinds. He raised them up and smiled down at us. We could see that he had a band-aid on his nose and we all did laugh then. We stopped when he held up a bag of penny candy, waving it hypnotically. We looked at each other and then back at the candy. Freddy began to eat it a piece at a time, making a great lip smacking show of it all. He got to the licorice, and we saw his lips and tongue go black. Then we all trudged off in disgust, refusing to look back.

By the time I was thirteen, I had to admit to myself that Freddy wasn't the sharpest knife in the drawer. I had mostly settled down by then, concentrating on the real important stuff, like tinkering and inventing time saving devices, and fixing up all the appliances. I made automatic food dispensers for our chicken house, and everyone liked them so much I had to make one for nearly every chicken house the county. I even won the Science Fair a couple of times. But Freddy, Henry, and the rest of that empty headed bunch were still cutting up and getting into trouble.

One day at school, Henry convinced Freddy to help him super glue all the teacher's desk drawers shut. It sort of backfired, because Freddy ended up gluing his hand to the desk top. He stood up at the teacher's desk, smiling all through class, and was stuck there til the principal came to take a look for himself.

Freddy went on to commit a string of real corksers. Most of them were just plain mean, stuff I'd never known he had the spite to pull. One weekend he stole a box of powdered dye out of mama's cupboard. He snuck into Old Lady Grayson's place and filled her shower head with it. She looked like a giant overripe blueberry for going on two weeks, and I was busier than a one handed snake charmer keeping him out of trouble over that one.

The very next month, Henry talked Freddy into putting a pack of firecrackers into the ashtray in John Matty's pick-em-up. To hear John tell it, it was like a chorus of machine guns going off inside his truck. He jumped the brakes, skidded about fifty feet, and spilled over

all the workers that were riding in the back. He jumped out of that truck and laid himself flat on the road, looking like something that had gotten run over. To this day everyone calls him ol' roadkill.

I told Freddy not to do it, but I might as well have been whistling in the dark for all the good it did. I kept trying to teach him to say no and behave himself, and each time I thought I got it right, he'd go out and pull another caper. I felt like it was my fault, so I tried one last time to set things right. I went and talked to my ma.

"I have to talk to you about Freddy," I said.

"Oh that boy. He's such a card."

"Oh yeah, he's a regular card all right." Trouble was, he was the Joker. Or maybe the wild card, waiting to pop up in life's secret hand.

"Ma, something's got to be done about Freddy." She put down her sewing and looked at me like I'd just handed her a dead skunk.

"Don't be wasting your time doing something about nothing." She went back to her work and it was then that I washed my hands of the whole matter.

I let them sit happy in the middle of nowhere while I fiddled with junk from the barn. I only ever pulled one other stunt after that, and it was just to test this theory I had. There was this supposedly secret government tracking station just down the road, and I got to wondering if something as small as aluminum dust would set the radars off. I was pretty sure it would, but the problem was getting it high enough into the air without them seeing anything. I took a file to one of my mother's old aluminum pans and stuffed the shavings into one of Porter's balsa rockets. The kind you set off by touching a wire to a car engine. Anyway, the whole thing worked and soon there were stories in the paper about UFO's.

Freddy knew about the whole thing, and everybody knows that secrets go through him faster than grass through a goose. So the government paid us a visit, looking scary behind their shiny glasses and fancy suits. They asked me what other kind of notions I got to having, and I told them about all kinds of stuff I made, including this bomb I invented out of Drano. They sent me to school to someplace I had never heard of before and it was all I could do to keep up with their "formal education." And now while I invent gadgets for the Trans-Atlantic Research Corporation, and Henry and the gang get drunk on my beer, Freddy sits in jail.

"So," Henry said, "Don't you think it was that old laundry chute that made him go sour as milk?"

"Definitely," Jodi-lee agreed.

I pictured Freddy sitting in that window and eating up the penny candy. "Not by a mile," I said and left it at that.

Virginia Shirley



Janet Allen

Alice's Cup

Stoneware



Anne Flues

Penis on Wheels

Stoneware

mr. coffee

My coffee maker purrs
When it drips down to make me a drink
You're only purpose is to serve me-
You are worthless without me
I'm your master-
Your King- your Lord
You will slave for me happily,
Coffee Man

Pretend you're delighted to serve me
As I confine you to your counter top-
Don't clean you, give you cheap grounds
Don't give to me any hint you have pride

I can unplug you

Joel Mog



Kim Stoker ·

Masked

Stoneware



Jennifer Carroll

Cherry

Lithograph

Psychic Cuts Off Own Head - Rushes Self To Hospital!

At least that's what the headline said.
The thick handed shopper standing in line
peered over his paper and read on.
Poor Famed Psychic Madam Loretta!
Destined to end up sandwiched between
the Bat Boy Found Hiding In Woman's Closet
and the German Warplane Flown By Crew of Skeletons.
The instrument of Fate?
Not an ax, a kitchen knife or a
chainsaw, but a freak
accident with her own crystal ball.
"Good heavens, dear me." said the
man with a frown. With just a page to go
he willed the checker to slow down -
He simply had to reach the end
of Madam Loretta and her true-life
mind/body dilemma!
Imagine her chagrin when her head fell into the lap
of the earnest nail biter who wanted only to know --
you'll pardon the expression --
if she would ever get ahead in the world.

It could have gotten ugly,
but being tops in her profession
Loretta kept her wits about her
and cancelled all other sessions,
then leaped into her paisley VW bus
and loaded her bawling head
into the child car seat she'd purchased
at a yard sale for just such an emergency.
The head barked commands, "Turn right and turn left!"
But the body, poor thing, was out of its mind
and came close to losing its way.
"Hurry, Loretta!" said the shopper, his sweaty hands
smudging the ink off the paper.
But he read on, by now submersed
in the cosmic psychic plot.
Madam Loretta made it to the hospital
in plenty of time. But the body forgot to
stop, and crashed into the side
of the emergency room entrance.
The body fell out, the head rolled away,
and the doctors were so shocked they
had nothing Latin to say.
And there, at the scene,
Madam Loretta was pronounced dead.
The ham handed shopper folds up the paper,
placed it back in the rack. Smug. Satisfied.
"She should have known," was all that he said.

Virginia Shirley

Larger Than Life

larger than life, or you,
I step on your head
and laugh as your eyes vertically squint
your begging for stop
rings in my ears as a
plea for more
the tears form a puddle
that gags and chokes you
into an amber shade that
warms my heart
harder now
your teeth sound of popcorn
as they eject from their sockets
and your mouth fills with gems
I kick your stomach and your
dentistry litters the floor
no more smiles
no more talk
I lean down
with the kiss of death
and carry on.

Eric Axelson

1993 Melchers Prize for Two-Dimensional Art



Jeremy Austin

Troy

Mixed Media

1993 Chandler Prize for Poetry

The Distaff

"Truer than women,
They seed so effortlessly"
Sylvia Plath, "Winter Trees"

I have not gone crazy.
have not noted bud-taut leaves
 jaundiced infant fists uncurling
not breathed virgin blossoms heat-limp
 rusted, rudely wind-stripped
I've not gone mad.
not felt membranes menopausal crumble
 leaving brittle bone-veins
heard bare-branch screeching
 leaf-ghost laughter
 soon snow shrouded
 cycle repetitious resurrection
I have not gone crazy
 vicious

But I've swallowed the seed.

Terry Gur

1993 Melchers Prize for Three-Dimensional Art



Anne Flues

Medusa Chalice

Stoneware

1993 Chandler Prize for Fiction

Sophie Will Keep Her Maiden Name

Sophie Keller has found another place she wouldn't mind dying. Last summer it was the window seat at the end of the upstairs hall. Her mother would find her there, a limp body backlit by the afternoon sun, and cry for hours. She would rock back and forth, stroke Sophie's hair, and wonder why she had to tell her now-dead daughter that the poor dear's hair was not chestnut, but mouse-brown.

For three months Sophie placed herself strategically in front of every picture window in the house so that when she finally did die, everyone would smile sadly at her funeral, and tell the relatives from Carolina that she died happy ("She did love looking out, didn't she?"). She wanted to be remembered in windows that summer.

But by this June she'd had an entire year to think, and it didn't take her long to realize that her Grandma Keller's window seat was a rotten place to be called away. It's like God's own oven up there in the summer. Nobody even sleeps there, let alone tramps up the stairs in the middle of the afternoon. She could sit there for days and roast, and smell. She was also sick of looking out every damn window in the house.

No, it had to be the glider. As she pulled another strip of green paint from the metal underneath, Sophie wondered why she hadn't thought of it before. They'll find her out here, ankles still crossed and propped casually on the bare spot of the porch railing, the glider moving gently beneath her. For a second they'd think, "Maybe she's still alive." But no. There she will sit, dead.

The only hitch is her legs. They only reach the railing if she scoots down so the crook of her neck ends up where her rear end should be. This position does not fit into Sophie's ideal death scene, and she sweats. That's no way to die.

Her sister Madeline's voice blows out of the kitchen and settles on the front porch where Sophie sits, still trying to work out the leg dilemma. She gives up for the moment and twists around until she is lying on her back; it's time to find out what Madeline came to talk to their Mama about. She slowly sits up, just the way Count Dracula did in the movie she and Aunt Sister watched last weekend and turns to face the screen door.

All she needed to hear was her sister's tragedy voice saying, "I just worry about the poor lamb." That voice, which arrived as soon as Madeline graduated from Bible college with a degree in youth

pastorship, was more often than not cast in Sophie's direction. "The poor, fatherless child," she'd say, shaking her head, which always seemed to be cradled in one or both of her hands—like the hand of God was going to swoop down and turn her into a stained glass window that very second.

Last week's sermon was "The Lack of a Paternal Influence in the Life of Sophie Keller." Madeline seemed to think, just because Sophie doesn't remember her father, that she'd never learn how to talk to boys, never catch a husband, and therefore end up living with her sister until her lonely death at the age of forty. Sophie used to worry a little when her sister sounded so sure like that, but not after yesterday.

Sophie is in love. His name is Porter and he is fifteen. At first she worried a little about the age difference, but it is only two years. After deciding that he was older, but not a lot smarter than she was, Sophie realized she'd love him until the day she died, which may be by late August if this growth spurt pans out.

But if that gypsy with the mauve fingernails was wrong and she doesn't die young, Porter has to marry her. For one thing, they'd have adorable children, chestnut hair and thin noses. For another, she would have a field day telling the story of when they met. "You remember, don't you, Porter?" She'd pat his leg and lean over to the person she'd be talking to. There she was on that dusty June morning, just sitting on the glider, drinking a Coke, when up walks the sweetest looking boy she had ever laid eyes on. No hello, no introduction.

He just walks up, as bold as you please and tells her that he wants to be the first man to make a baby in space. "Isn't that the sweetest thing," Sophie would ask her friend, then smile with all the love in the world at her husband.

Actually, she didn't think it was so sweet yesterday. She thought it was pretty awful that he didn't even ask her if she minded giving birth in zero-gravity.

"You got a bike, little girl?"

Sophie squinted down at the boy standing in her Grandma's front yard.

"You got a name, little boy?" She took a sip of her warm Coke, crossed her legs, and waited for an answer. He had a scab on his right knee, still bright red from a dose of merthiolate. Sophie wondered if he cried when he fell.

"Porter. And I ain't no boy. I'll be sixteen in September. You got a bike?"

Sophie pulled her knee to her chin. To hell with her mother. She will shave her legs this summer. "My name is Sophia Janine Keller." She waited for a proper response. He just pulled a string out of his cut-offs and started tying it in knots. "And you shouldn't say

'ain't'. People'll think you're slow."

Whenever her sister, Madeline, used to talk to boys (before she started talking to God) she'd sort of stick her chin forward, like all those pictures of Garbo she tore off her walls and gave to Sophie as soon as she got religion. Sophie decided to try her sister's pose out on Porter. She locked her elbows at her sides, swung her ankles underneath the glider, and tilted her neck back as far as she could without losing sight of him altogether.

"Something wrong with your neck?"

The boy had a hell of a lot of nerve. Just waltzing into her Grandma's front yard on a Sunday afternoon, spouting off some story about a space ship, and now won't hold up his end of a respectful conversation. Sophie shot up from the unsuccessful sexpot position and glared at him.

"My neck is just fine, thank you for your concern." She caught herself sounding like a real snit; Lord, just like Madeline. Sophie tried not to forget who she was. "Porter?" Much softer this time. She flashed him a smile that her Uncle Vance once told her made the sun shine brighter, not enough to show gums though. He was the first blessed by her new and improved power smile, the one she'd practiced until her cheeks hurt. First, she'd kind of turn up the corners of her mouth, pause for just a second, and then let the smile spread up her face until her eyes twinkled. At least they were supposed to twinkle. It might have been the light in Aunt Sister's bathroom.

Charm wasn't working. Porter had already started looking toward the road, kicking the mulch Sophie and her Mama spent all Saturday spreading around the hydrangia bushes. He did that sort of stretchy-neck thing boys do when they want to be somewhere else, and then went back to picking at his shorts. Sophie knew she was losing him. Family secrets were all that could save her.

She slowly untangled her legs from the underside of the glider and stood up so she was looking down on him. In her front yard, from her porch. "I'll tell you something," she said, holding herself as high above him as she could. She said it like, "I'm just telling you this because you're new in town and I'm the nicest girl around." Now she had his attention; he was squinting up at her, still too far away to be in the shadow of the house. "We have a Yankee soldier buried in our back field. My great, great, granddaddy shot him two days after the end of the war. They buried him by the woods so no one would ever know. And my grandma said..."

"You and half this county."

"What?" Sophie pushed her bangs off her forehead, trying hard to catch up to whatever Porter had just said. But all she really knew was that she had been interrupted. "What did you just say to me?"

"You and half this county have Yankees buried in your backyards. They must've used them for target practice down here." He had just ruined her story. Sophie couldn't think of a thing to say so she just stood there watching him as he walked up the front stairs and sat on the glider. "Look," he said. Sophie was waiting for him to start drinking her Coke; that would just top it off. "Look, I want to see the river before the flooding goes down. If you've got a bike, I'll let you go with me."

She'd taken all she was going to.

"You don't have to let me go anywhere." She would not let her voice shake. She raised her eyebrow at him and continued. "I will go anywhere I damn well please. And as for going with you...not in this lifetime, mister."

A voice from the back of the house. "Sophie Janine Keller, you watch your mouth." Porter snorted.

She lowered her voice to what Madeline told her was a demonic whisper and hissed, "I wouldn't go to the river or anywhere else with you." By now she was leaning right in his face. "I don't even know who you are." Sophie hadn't realized until she said it. He was a stranger. She had let a stranger get her this riled up. She leaned even closer for her final swipe. "Who are you anyway?"

She stepped back to watch him crumble. What an awful boy. Not only did he just destroy the story of that dead soldier in the pasture, but he ruined even the tiniest dream Sophie had about the two of them out there in the steamy night, together, trying to dig up the old Yankee. She'd have her daddy's old camping lamp, and Porter would be so impressed that she knew how to light it. She'd take him down the fence line until they were at the edge of the woods and he'd turn to face her. "Are you sure you want to see this, Sophie?" He'd take her hand for a second. "I don't want you to have bad dreams or anything." And she'd say yes and then they'd dig. And when they finally got to the body, Sophie would faint. And she'd wake up and he'd be there, leaning over her, saying her name over and over.

"This isn't the way to the river," Sophie said to Porter's back. They'd taken a wrong turn ages before, but she was just going to let him dig his own grave. He was ahead of her, but he was going the wrong way. "Porter." She swerved the front of the old Schwinn to miss the hole in the road. Everytime she hit a bump, her grandma's old bike would squeak like it was about to break in two, and Porter would laugh at her. He was riding with no hands, once in a while grabbing at the weeping willows that drooped down over Rockbridge Road. Sophie stood up to pedal, tried to catch up. "Porter, this is not the way to the river." She was getting close to his back tire when he stopped all of a sudden. Sophie jerked the handlebars to keep from slamming the big, blue, monster bike into Porter's spit-shined, red one, and stopped

just short of flying into Rockbottom Creek that ran alongside the road.

She was about ready to take her thirty pound bike and go right back home. To hell with him. She tried to swing around and start pedaling but she didn't cut her turn sharp enough and instead of making a sweeping exit, she just went off the other side of the road.

"Sophie, where are you going?" Porter was leaning over his handlebars, watching her.

"I'm turning around." She finally gave up and planted her feet on the ground, picked the front of the bike off the grass and swung it back toward the road.

"You are not. You driving right into a pile of poison oak." Porter was making no move to help Sophie get her bike on the road.

"I'm trying to go home. This is not the way to the river. This never was the way to the river. And I will not let you drag me into the swamp just because you've got a cockeyed sense of direction." Sophie decided to go at him with all guns. "You've had me on this blasted road for the last fifteen minutes. I will not go anywhere with some rude boy who won't answer me when I talk."

"I know this isn't the way to the river. Lord God, I'm not stupid." Porter propped his bike against a maple tree and started walking toward Sophie. For a second she thought he was going to hit her or something. Instead he grabbed the middle of the handlebars and yanked her bike back up onto the road. With one hand. Sophie watched his muscles pop out. Porter kept talking. "I've got to go home first and tell my sister where I'm going. I've been gone since this morning, early. And I want some dinner." Porter rubbed his nose with the back of his hand. "You want to eat with us?"

Sophie spun one of her bicycle tassles long enough to give her answer the proper amount of thought. "Yes," she said. "Lunch would be fine."

There was someone on Porter's front porch glider. She couldn't have been any older than Sophie's sister, Madeline, maybe twenty or so. She didn't seem to be looking at anything, just staring at the tops of the trees across the driveway.

"That's my sister. Dorothy. She's an old maid."

Porter and Sophie were pushing their bikes along the front fence. Sophie stared at Dorothy moving back and forth on the glider.

"She's no old maid. She's too young."

"Well, she's going to be. She said she'll never get married ever since her fiance got shot. She told my grandma she's lost all her love." Porter started peeling paint off the fence while Sophie watched his sister. "That's why Mama and Daddy sent us here for the summer. She'd stopped eating and sleeping. I came to watch her; I'm going to make sure she gets better."

"Shot," Sophie mumbled to herself. "Shot?" She turned to face

Porter. "How did he get shot?" Porter didn't answer. He turned his face into the sun and took a deep breath. "Porter?...Porter."

"Hunting," he said without looking back at her. "Last deer season he got shot by his cousin." He looked at his sister for a second. Sophie knew now that he was sensitive. Any boy who could look at his sister like that must truly love all women.

Sophie could only whisper. "She has got to be the saddest girl I've ever seen." She propped her elbows on the fence and rested her chin on her fists. "We could ask her to go to the river with us, Porter."

"She won't go." He stood beside her and they watched Dorothy from the fence. She was watching them now, too-- sitting there, rubbing her forehead with the back of her hand. Just the picture of misery.

"Maybe she would. We could try." Sophie was itching to get closer to the house to get a better look. If Porter would introduce her, she was sure she could get Dorothy to go with them. "Well, you still want me to stay for dinner?" Somehow she would get up on that porch and talk to that girl.

"Yeah. Dorothy'll make us something." Sophie tried to catch his eye as he turned around to pick up his bike. He smiled at her a little.

Sophie knew Dorothy was watching them walk up the driveway, so she tried to stare off into the distance the way she'd seen Porter's sister do a few minutes before. As she followed Porter onto the porch, she glanced at Dorothy to see if she should smile. There she was, sort of tucked into the corner of the glider, with her legs pulled up under her.

"Hey, Porter," she said. It's like her voice was sad, too. "Have you found a friend?" She smiled at Sophie. "I'm surprised you're a girl. Porter just told me last week that he hated girls. Didn't you Porter?" She patted the glider beside her and motioned to Sophie. Then she took Porter's hand for a second. "Why don't you go inside and get us something to drink while I talk to the little girl."

Sophie was waiting for him to tell Dorothy to get her drink herself; but he just squeezed her hand and went inside. She turned back around to Sophie, "I'm Dorothy Ellen Randolph. What's your name, sweetheart?" She had the darkest eyes Sophie had ever seen and when she smiled they still looked like she was about to cry.

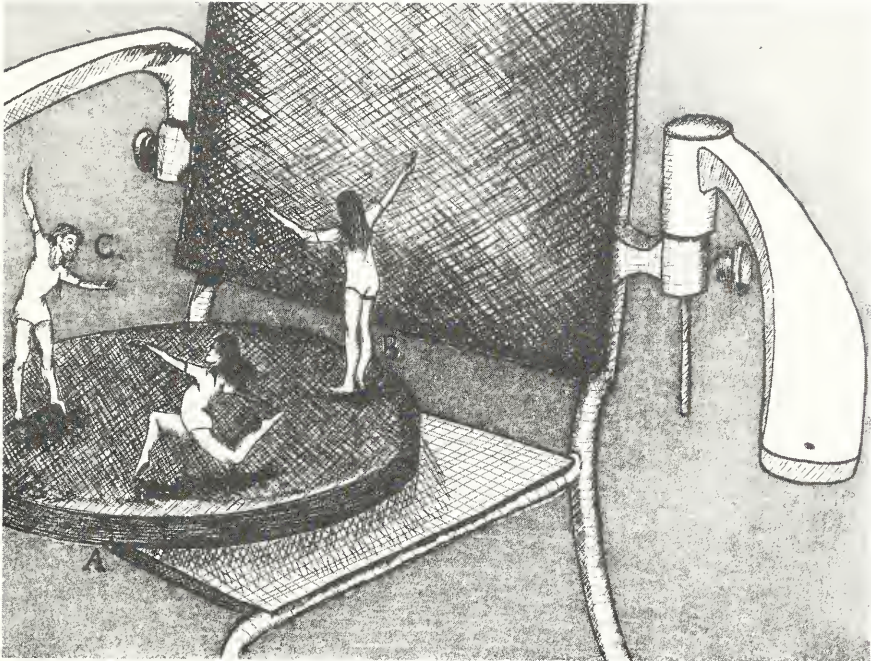
"I'm Sophie Janine Keller. I'm thirteen and a half. I live with my grandmother, my mother and my aunt." Sophie took a breath and Dorothy blinked. "My daddy died when I was two. I don't remember him at all. At least mama says I don't remember. I think I remember him holding me on his shoulders at a parade or something. He held me up there so I could see the Clydesdales, you know, the Budweiser horses..." She stopped so Dorothy could nod. But instead of nodding

she just laughed and got up. Her dress sort of moved ahead of her as she stretched and looked at the road.

"Porter didn't let you talk much, did he? I'll tell you what, Sophie Janine Keller." She slowly turned around to smile back at Sophie. "You marry my brother and you can keep me company in my old age. And you can talk to me all you want."

Sophie squinted so she could see further down the road. After yesterday, everything is fine. The summer will be fine. She'll dig up that Yankee with Porter. And every night she will sit on the porch with Dorothy until the one night when she tells Sophie the real story of her lost love. The summer will be just fine.

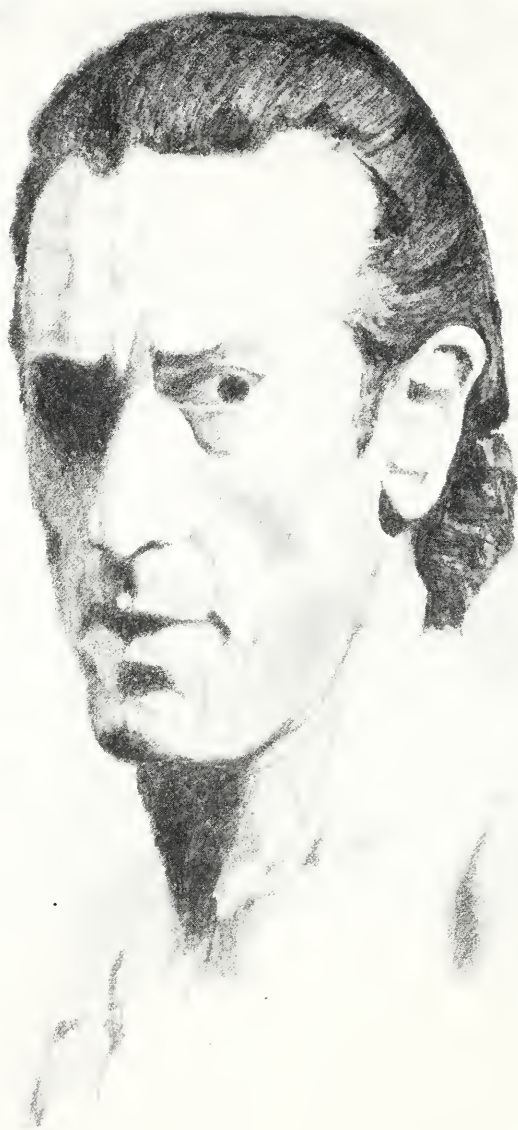
Shelby Driskill



Anne Flues

Steve's Chair After Hours

Etching



John Miller

Cady

Pencil

1975

Back when my uncle had not yet
been pulled by his long braid
into the state institution
we used to take walks behind
my grandfather's house in D.C..
He would lead me past the sewer tunnels
gripped by graffiti and have me spell
out the words, the letters fresh
in my mind from my 1st grade text.
His tattooed arms blocked the
Spanish men snuggling on the
iron grated gate,
long sweaty fingers passing a
pipe between them.
That was when the smell of
marijuana had not yet been
matched up in my mind as anything
but sweet smoke.
The beer cans and glass floating
down the stream were prisms
and special treasures.
At the end of our walk he would
point into a caged sewer pipe
and describe the lion that lived there,
hungry for little children.
Between laughing and crying I would scale
the cage, hurrying through long
seconds, feeling the great golden lion's
breath heavy on my heels.
this long straw-haired man frightened
and fascinated me with his sharp nails,
sleeveless shirts, and album covers
full of topless oriental women.
The dark yellowness of his face,
his room in the basement,
even the way he drank his milk

Kathy Cottle



Holly Dittmar

Vessel

Stoneware



Genine Lentine

Don't Bark

Acrylic

Untitled #2

A daffodil is not an answer
To Who Is Your Hero in a fourth grade essay. Only Super-
Man and Dad and Jesus and Mother Theresa can
Be correct. I had to go home and rewrite mine
About a person, but later I sat squirming in my chair without
A name in my head. The daffodils sipped from the bottle
On the dresser. Their thick stems had made a loud stalky
Sound when I picked them, and I kept them for their lion-hearted
Courage, for the laughing roar they make at dense and
Heavy winter, their mocking manes shaped like the sun.
They invited me to crawl inside their gaping mouths
And promised not to bite, but to swallow
Me up and digest my hesitance, making me know what it means to
Be brave, a spine strong as a pillar to push back the snow.

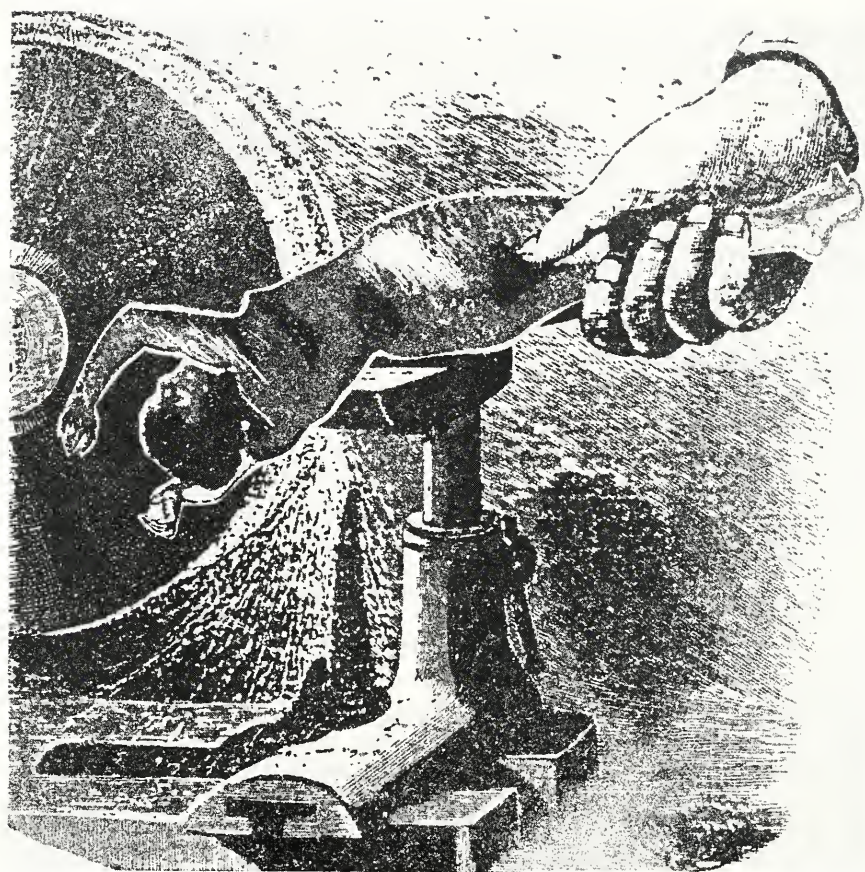
Caroline Porter



Mary Jane Bohlen

Janice

Gum Arabic Print



Anne Flues

Unwanted Inches Just Melt Away

Etching

Hands

As your child, I could tell you,
that before we started seeing eye to
eye and before you turned fallible
you were Chanel No. 5 wrapped
in True Menthols' cool smoke flavor
and that you were shirts whose open collars
were long and pointed
like the wings of quick birds.
And that you were lipstick, feathering on a glass.
But to be honest you were mostly hands
wet and wrinkled, like fish on my young skin,
soap clinging to your engagement ring,
strong fingers always damp from washing dishes.

Caroline Porter



Kim Stoker

Relucet

Pinhole Photograph

Cicada

Magic
earth released,
five silent shrouds cling
to tapering crape myrtle limbs,
brittle calling cards
announcing nature's mastery of conversion.

One alive is spectacle
plated in iridescence,
man's thumb-sized,
prism wings yet untried.

Keeping vigil,
jade eyes newly
view his abridged world
as brothers kettledrum
the wretched August air.

Erin Brick



Anne Flues

Leapin' Lizards

Etching

In Search of Jim Morrison, Bushmills, and Adult-size Steak

I thought I'd wait until the Bushmills and the Cheetos were exhausted until I'd stop. As it turned out I had the strength, no, the drive to continue past the depletion of both. I hit upon it as I watched the last few drops of whiskey filed into the cap of the upright bottle, "it would be nothing to attempt nothing." The pressure that had built up in my head, the misery made of stillborn creations that could live only in my mind, was gone. In its stead was a remarkable feeling of freedom. Freedom. What I intended to do with it was to use it.

I was thinking about the way Jim Morrison used to cock his entire body when he unleashed that primal scream. At the same time I drifted through the way that he maintained a sick sort of concern for people. Remarkable.

The girl at the table across from me, and out of my view, had problems. I could hear her prattling on about her failed relationship while her "friend," whom I suspected had more of an ear for suffering than she did for the girl's individual problems, confidently shot reassuring Cosmospeak at her in regular intervals. The bawling girl didn't hear any of it, but she didn't care, it was really serving as the license for continued digging of the dirt. Through sobs and the occasional squelched outburst she laid at the feet of her guide the whole terrible episode which was really a series of episodes held together by a consistent theme of betrayal. Between the artificial palm fronds came the cheerleadingly high pitched voice of the digger, coaching the words from her friend and, at strategic points, delicately twisting the knife spurring the pain to a fevered pitch. I guessed it made for easier listening. Finally, I couldn't take it anymore.

Leaping from my table, I thought to grab my steak knife--presumably for protection, I crashed through the Astro-palm and landed squarely in their midst. I noticed that both had ordered the child's plate, how strange, and yet, how typical. The mascara streaks that overlaid a surprised face made my damsel in distress easy to identify. I turned to the digging bitch. Typical repressed looking girl with cheap clothes on the tail end of good taste.

--I considered whether or not Jim was hot in those leather pants.

It was the kind of girl who could get a man with little effort but always found a reason to ruin her chances choosing the warm blanket of manhating disguised as feminism instead. She didn't know it was easier, but it was.

She must have seen a revealing look in my eyes because she strained against the back of her chair like a cornered cat. I grabbed a handful of her thin blond hair and pulled, hard. Her scream was cut

short by a slap across her face that shocked her more than it hurt. Now that I had their attention I spoke. "Shut up," I said, "just shut your fucking mouth." Immediate compliance. I imagined just punching a hole in her trachea with the steak knife right then and there, but then I had a better idea. "Please," I said holding out the dull grey knife to the other girl, "just cut her fucking throat, I'll hold her for you."

The people one finds in Western Sizzlin on a Wednesday night are a most precious breed. The two main groups consist of the "Free Salad" corps, with its bulging asses and waterbloomed abdomens, over which are stretched acid washed tent flaps with words like "Blast" or "Chic" stenciled on them. And the wannabees, a somewhat more educated bunch, who are embarrassed by their location, and show it. A silly condition given the fact that everyone else in the restaurant has no idea how far down the gastronomic food chain they really are.

As things heated up over in my little corner of the Flamekist steak world the wannabees began to edge carefully around our table and slide away. Some exhibited the expression of someone who knew he was in the wrong neighborhood before the trouble started and was now convinced that this was punishment for slumming it "down here." I'd say it was the face of "should've known better." I noticed the retreat of the wannabees in stark contrast to the bovine staring of the Free Salads. They weren't going anywhere and if a psycho came free with the meal, then dammit, they were going to enjoy every bit of it. Hell, it was like being on "Cops" or something.

I turned back to the girl, "Go ahead, you should do it."

During the interval my attention was focused elsewhere.

Mascara had evidently not been thinking about my offer, she stared blankly.

"She should cut your throat, shouldn't she?" I asked Cosmo.

"Please..." came the muffled response through my hand.

"I didn't ask you for a comment," I said menacing the knife over her face where she could see it. At this point some of the Free Salads realized that this was indeed more than some drunk redneck domestic dispute, this was the real thing, steak-knife and all. Chants and drums rang in my head, the silent sounds of growing.

Seizing the moment I forced the knife into Mascara's hand, fear made her grasp it. "Think of all of the pabulum, the self-serving condescension that you've had to bear. What is she, the model of femininity that she should tell you what to think? Anyone with a few bucks can buy that bullshit advice and not have to suffer through it in this salad and jello shithole. You suck, you miserable piece of shit, she won't tell you that and you're too fucking stupid to even realize it." I wanted her to wallow in it.

"This girl couldn't give a shit about you, she just feeds on your pain and pumps you with the prompting little comments that keep the

feast coming. Inside, she's laughing at you, she's glad you're miserable and she can't get enough of it. After you leave here she'll call every sadsack, every catloving, repressed, manhating bitch that she knows and tell them all with glee that they have a new member in the group. They'll all smile at you, worry about you, and call you for hourly pain reports. They'll bathe in your misery and deny they're doing anything but helping you as they air your most intimate secrets in select, cigarette sucking groups. They will masturbate themselves while they mindfuck you and act like its some sort of favor. They'll get fat without any guilt because they've got you to prove to themselves that their sorry, fucked up lives aren't so bad. Now, I ask you, what are you going to do?"

Slowly, almost magically, the knife began to rise. I have to admit, I moved a little out of the way in case the girl had a change of heart regarding her choice of targets. I pulled Cosmo's head back exposing more throat, getting a tingling feeling in the back of my own in the process. The knife continued to rise and I considered what supplier Western Sizzlin used for its serving pieces, I hoped they hadn't chintzed.

It seemed funny to me how fast things had turned around for ole Cosmo. She never expected this. And as she began to struggle out from under the presumed trajectory of the steak knife I had to employ more of my body weight to hold her steady. I thought, "I hope this crazy bitch doesn't miss." The derision made me dizzy, so much disgust, and I could feel the blood pumping in my ears.

My mouth began to water as the knife began its cruel descent. Lime jello, fruit cup, the stupid child's plate in front of an adult, where was my waitress? This fucking place—

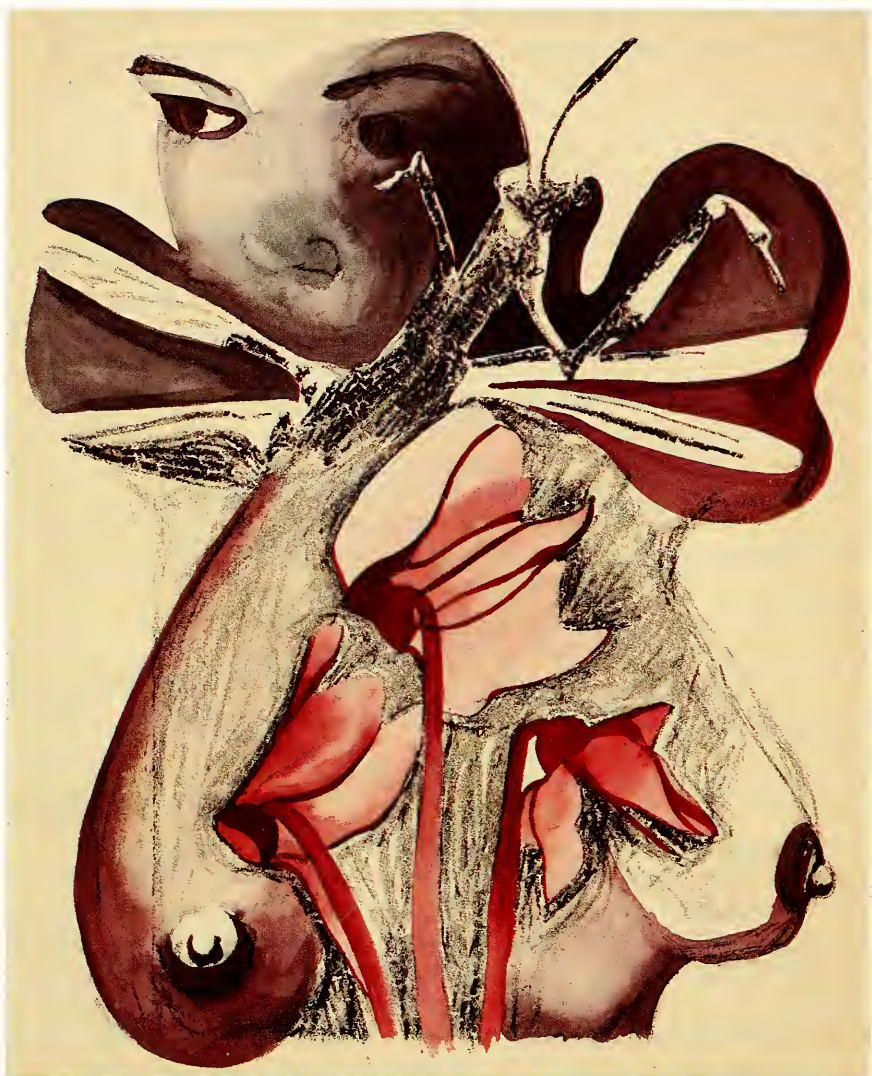
Suddenly my vision blurred, blood blinded me as the knife, dulled and scratched, with its water-worn wood handle plowed home as much as cut. The dull blade pounded out its course with a sort of gritty proficiency, and I fell, blinded, delirious, and laughing on that well worn floor. I thought I heard "Riders on the Storm" softly playing and it danced on my back like an Indian.

The fire was hot and tall, and as I gyrated and thrustured around it naked in the night and dressed in blood I heard drums— saw dreams and reflections of myself, sought passage, and stomped in the dirt.

"Fuck, fuck, yeah, fuck... I yelled in time. Smiling as I went.

That bitch, that silly bitch. Never had anything been so funny, or so stupid. The Free Salads heaved themselves to their feet in a carnivorous ovation for me. As I passed into a slick warm separation I saw their fat frames meandering happily away, glass plates at their waists, in search of fruit cup, and an adult size steak.

Rob Bartenstein



Jennifer Carroll

We Eat Our Mates

Lithograph/Watercolor

(haiku 2)

reluctant virtue
chafes my skin, as I lie in
night grass wet with dew

Terry Gur



Jennifer Carroll

Doug

Watercolor

The Hunt in Old Fields

about supper-time
a martin flits
mockingly
across the air
like a flat rock
tossed low and loose
on the neighbor's pond.

he holds his roost
on the peak
of a cedar
with ease.

below, a mere boy
slinks about.

the martin boasts internal song,
ignores the rude
gnashing underneath.

the boy blasts his BB
much too high.

the anthem persists,
the hunter reloads
with palsied fingers.

the martin
doesn't even notice
the rising speck
of metal.

the boy
watches his envy --
wings folded --
dive into the
tall wild grass
reporting a single
rustle.

days later
mushroomheads sip
rotting evidence
through
slender
stalks.

Ken Marshall



Mary Jane Bohlen **Symphony** Alabaster



Janet Allen

Child's Play

Oil

i don't think i feel like doing this right now
because i've got this pain in my side
and then there's that show on tv that i simply can't miss
and what if somebody calls and i'm so deep in thought i don't hear them
what if i get lost in my brain
that can happen, y'know
i heard about this woman once she thought so hard
they thought she was in a coma
so they took her away to some hospital
and all the while she was thinking
and they put her on life support
because she thought so hard
that her brain sucked the air right out of her lungs
so they kept pumping her brain full of air
and finally her family said turn her off she's not coming back
and her mom cried for days about the poordeargirl
until the minister comforted her with stuff
stuff like how she was happier where she was
and that she's taken a step on the path to a better place
but all along the girl was thinking
and what she was thinking was how do you get mildew off a shower curtain
and is language really arbitrary
and then the one that did her in-if a tree falls in a forest
how do the squirrels know when to jump off
so what i want to know is
is it really safe in there
in my mind, i mean
and is that minister right?
are shower curtains and squirrels the first step to salvation?
i'd have to be inclined to disagree
but i'd certainly be willing to change my mind
if i'm wrong
so is it safe in there?
in my mind, i mean

Jean Sutula



Anne Flues

Shoe and Shoe with Cracker

Stoneware



Kim Stoker

Amorphousness

Stoneware

The Check

Satchell's head immediately started to itch when the announcement came on the intercom for Cloney Ct. bus to report to the nurse's office. Satchell had become used to the monthly meetings with Miss Rowe, the long crooked line twisting out from her office and left towards the gym, dark arms and legs moving like an impatient black centipede. She found the end of the line and listened to the two boys in front of her declare they knew who had it, the girl who missed school a lot, the ugly girl with the nappy hair.

Satchell's younger brother stepped out of the office. Smiling, he patted his head, winked at Satchell, and headed back to the jungle gym. By the time it was Satchell's turn her head felt like it was going to explode.

While Miss Rowe snapped on new gloves, Satchell thought of the kids who had never returned from the exam, who were hidden away in some secret room while Miss Rowe informed their parents and the rest of the school that the student would not be returned to class until the problem was taken care of. When they returned a few days later their desks were always pushed away from their row and their pencils were always missing.

As Miss Rowe parted Satchell's hair with two tongue depressors, Satchell knew she would see everything, the unwashed hair, the stained clothes, she would know there had been times when Satchell's mother had disappeared, when Satchell had went hunting for her and found nothing but concrete. She would see Satchell's tiny apartment, the broken refrigerator, her sick aunt, the nights she did not mind her uncle's body because it was the only warm thing.

Satchell felt the probing stop and knew her enemy had been found. Slowly, she turned her frightened face around to Miss Rowe.

"You look alright," Miss Rowe grumbled, "Send in the next one."

Satchell did not even bother to smooth down her hair or pin it in place as she walked back to class. She was safe, at least for this month. They would know she was alone, not allowing anything to live off of her, as she sat back down at her desk, holding her lonely head high enough for any world.

Kathy Cottle



Holly Dittmar

Stairwell

Photograph

F-Stop

My grandfather took a picture,
focused beyond his ability,
crystal sharp, black and white chaos
of a long ago war zone.

It is a small thing, a brief second
pinned down with chemical fixative
and Kodak paper.

It is the picture of a young man
screaming as a bullet punctures
the side of his head. His assassin,
really a child in a uniform shirt, holds the gun.
It is large and looks like part of his hand.

My history professor once introduced me
to a dark eyed woman - my own age -
one of my classmates but I didn't know her.
She asked me about my grandfather's photograph
a record of her own grandfather's death.

What could I say to her?

No, my grandfather did not know the man
shot by his Nikon. Did not know the man
who would cause a caesura in the heartbeat
of the world. Never knew what became
of the boy with the gun, barely understood
the causes or the fight.

In fact, my Grandfather rarely spoke
of the photograph, except to say, when asked,
that he wished he had never taken it.
He was marked not for authoring the moment
but by recording it, for invading more
than just a country and leaving behind
a doubled negative to be printed in memory
and the pages of textbooks.

Virginia Shirley



Jeremy Austin

Untitled

Mixed Media

Rocking-Chair

Mama's doing it again,
thinks 12 year-old Clarissa
as she bends down to pick up
an ash-filled Budweiser can
in one hand, and a gnat-covered piece of
cheese pizza in the other.
Barefoot, Joey wanders by in his
homemade cloth diaper
sucking brownish colored water out of
an old baby-doll's bottle,
screaming when he squishes the roaches
sliding across the floor.
Mama stares at the fuzzy T.V. screen
and gnaws on the black-grey kernels of popcorn
she holds in the torn edge of an old paper towel,
sucks down beers and hurls the cans
across the room where they collect on the floor.
Joey approaches Mama and lightly places
his tiny hand on Mama's swollen knee
hoping to be invited up
but instead is smacked away.
He bends down and picks a black-brown kernel
up from the floor
and rolls it around in his fingers.
He watches Mama
and shoves it in his mouth
where it slips past his tongue
down to his throat,
where it stays.
He gasps,
Mama kicks Joey in the back
and he and the kernel fall to the ground.
Clarissa breezes by, picks up her confused brother
and carries him to the
splintered rocking-chair in
the corner of the one-bedroom apartment.
He doesn't cry
but passively watches his older sister
wondering what will happen next.
Twelve year-old Clarissa clings to her baby
and together they rock
and mourn for Mama
sullenly passing out,
silently passing away.

Christina Joubran



Max Tüffler

Silent Trumpeter

Photograph

the winter martyr

outside the window
new snow dresses
otherwise naked brown trees
in the sting of pale december

inside
mother reminds me to avoid
the fickle ice lace
of neighborhood ponds.

weaving dreams of
prohibited adventure
i trudge toward Pandora's box,
scarring delicate white perfection.

reaching the stony frozen ebb
i consider the slick iced surface
and desire its sensation underfoot.
i consider, then disregard, the
familiar warning and stretch a tentative
boot (size 5) to the wondrous strange surface when

a doe's watery coal eyes surprise mine.
seized with death beneath the pond's polished pain,
matted tufts of thick frozen mange
tangle her collapsed rigid hide.
mother's mumbled warning echoes and

i step from the wintry enigma
with blinding icicle tears.
i turn slowly homeward,
curiosity's victimized champion.

Adam Owings



Brian Hollingsworth

Angel

Photograph

Statistics Talk

I was
another woman reduced
to a sordid heap of litter in a careless garden,
among crumpled burger wrappers,
glint resistant hubcaps, chucked beer cans,
and ginger-tinged droppings from some hefty dog.
So now, you must not consider me in single dimensions.
I was more than the newsprint victim. I was
more than the wholesome grin in the yearbook. I was more
than just the flawless daughter.
Still,
I wish the earth had surveyed my deficiencies
and adopted me as laurel-armored Daphne's sister,
salvaging me from the brutality inflicted
by some mother's maniacal son.

Erin Brick

ending

in snowtime thick white crust
covers every surface
tiny insulated boots punch holes
leaving strange messages

'Now' father says bringing sticks and logs

dark eyes hunt the outside
wondering why the ice-wind is allowed inside
but, she can't make snow angels

By the kitchen sink mother stands mute

beautiful drifts of snow are horrible
and confining
pushing closed the doors and
covering the green

'Now' father says scraping creasote and crud

woodstove smoke curls into corners
and furniture
her insulated coat smells
reminding her of the tight cabin

Mother goes to the basement to sort the dirty from the clean

icicles like jaws hang outside the
frostbitten windows
and pine trees wear fashionable
dresses of unfashionable lumps

'Now' father says shoveling ashes and soot

hands grip layers of thick wool
waiting in the dark
for the third stair that creaks
signaling his arrival

'Now' father says and, blind, her
mother turned in the
stillness of waiting
for spring

Jennifer Carroll

Cabin Fever

When we got tired of the cabin,
of Mozart, and surprisingly each other,
we trudged through the first winter snow.
Layers of clothes, our pathetic armor,
separate us, insulate us, so that the numbness
we feel stays in our bones and out of our hearts.

In the blue shadowed hollow we found the ruins
of an old farm house: roofless slouch;
perpetual skylight. We climbed over
tangled chimney stones, crossed the threshold
of an empty door frame, set up house
with the mice and slumbering squirrels.
"Best kind of neighbors," you said.

Leaning back, we saw the stained glass ceiling of blue
through slim black fingers of a tree.
As the day warmed we made our plans;
an atrium, hardwood floors, thick timbers and a
see through roof. By the time it was built in our minds
the sky had grown grey as an old mood.
It crowded in, discontent,
and we were baptized by indifferent clouds.

We ran back, broke the cabin's marbled silence
swept it into a dustpan, threw it to
the hungry rain. Our clothes stuck,
stubborn, second skins. Abandoned.
In worn flannel robes we ate our soup,
our day fading into the routine patterns
of the hand stitched quilt in the bedroom.

Later under the same blanket,
we read by the fire.
Your warmth is a part of me
and I want to hold this moment
between my fingers.
Shut this contentment up in a bottle,
and hide it away on the shelf
to take out later
to stir into our coffee
as we grow old.

Virginia Shirley

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